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AUTHOR Enos, Theresa
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ABSTRACT

Responding to the Chapman/Tate survey (1987), which concluded that U.S. doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition lack a well-defined core of related courses, a survey investigated courses offered in 37 doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition. Questionnaires probed three areas: (1) whether or not classical rhetoric was offered, and, if offered, whether it was part of the core requirements; (2) frequency of the course offering, length of time it had been offered in the program, qualifications of the faculty who taught it, average enrollment, and area of student specialty; and (3) coverage, approach, required texts and sample assignments. Findings revealed a lack of uniformity among programs. A course in classical rhetoric was offered in 76% of the programs; and classical rhetoric was a core requirement in 50% of the programs. Programs that offer the course in classical rhetoric generally offer it every other year, and it is usually taught by a faculty member who is a generalist rather than a specialist in rhetoric. Most courses run one semester, and cover ancient to modern rhetoric. The fact that most of these courses are sweeping one-semester surveys may make meaningful connections to the teaching of writing difficult. In addition, the appropriation of classical rhetoric in composition studies may be leading to theoretical disharmony between rhetoricians and compositionists. (ARH)

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Theresa Enos
University of Arizona
1988 CCCC (St. Louis)

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Definition, Development, Direction: The Course in Classical Rhetoric

The Chapman/Tate descriptive survey of 38 doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition has given us valuable information about these programs, which, for the most part, have sprung up only within the last ten years. The survey, published in last spring's Rhetoric Review, revealed our programs' deep structure; it also has raised some questions about the definition, development, and direction of our doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition.

Few of the 38 programs that sent written materials for the survey listed classical rhetoric as a core requirement, and almost half listed no history of rhetoric courses. However, 35 of the 38 programs listed a theories of composition course. I think a study of how or if classical rhetoric is offered in English departments perhaps can be the most revealing of both the foundations and direction of our programs in rhetoric and composition. Because the availability of as well as the teaching approach to classical rhetoric can show the foundations on which our programs are built and the theoretical directions they may be taking, I prepared a questionnaire on the classical rhetoric course offered in English departments, mailed it to 41 doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition, and eventually received 37 completed questionnaires. Today I want to report on my own survey findings and offer at least some tentative conclusions.

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There are, as you'll see, areas for further study.

Two of my primary survey questions were does the program offer a course in classical rhetoric and, if so, is the course part of the core requirements. Twenty-eight out of the 37 programs (76%) that sent written materials reported they either offer a course in classical rhetoric or a course wherein a substantial part is devoted to classical rhetoric. Eight (23%) do not offer the course, but in six of these eight the course is offered in Speech Communication. Two programs reported that the course is listed but not taught. And two programs reported the course is not offered at all. Four programs reported that the course offered in the English Department is also offered in Speech Communication.

The 76 percent of programs offering the course differ from the Chapman/Tate percentages because some of the 28 programs defined as a course in classical rhetoric where one-third, about five weeks, or less, is devoted to classical rhetoric. These courses are, in the words of one respondent, "a rush through rhetoric." Some courses, titled Rhetoric and Composition (or Composition and Rhetoric), are really topic courses that can take any focus. In one program it depends on who teaches the course whether it is history of rhetoric or the teaching of composition. Course names are quite varied. Only six are called History of Rhetoric, and two are named History and Theories. (The naming of one course title, a respondent told me, has a long and hilarious story. In 1976 the course had been "The Philosophy of Rhetoric," but that's the title of Richards' book, so the title was changed

to "Philosophy of Composition," which became the title of Hirsch's book, so the program changed it to its present title, "The Rhetorical Tradition and the Teaching of Composition, at which point Knoblauch and Brannon appeared.) Other course titles are Theory and Practice of Rhetoric, Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse, Major Rhetorical Texts, Historical Studies, Rhetoric of Written Discourse. I was somewhat surprised that more of the course names didn't have the word "written" in the title to distinguish the course from the one offered in Speech for the last 75 years. Perhaps crossing departmental lines in the teaching of rhetoric is not the problem it was in the 70s. This subject needs further exploration.

The classical rhetoric course is a core requirement in 50 percent of the programs in contrast to the 91 percent of programs requiring composition theory. (In one program classical rhetoric is required, but it's offered only in Speech Communication.) These percentages suggest that we cannot assume the study of classical rhetoric as foundational for composition studies in our doctoral programs. In fact, it is possible for a student to have a PhD specialty in rhetoric and composition without having had a course in classical rhetoric. The question here for further study is, then, how are we to define the rhetoric/comp specialist?

The next series of survey questions I asked focused on the frequency of the course offering, length of time it has been offered in the program, qualifications of the faculty who teach it, average enrollment, and area of student specialty. In the

majority of programs, the course is offered every other year and has been offered only within the last ten years. Usually, only one person teaches the course, a faculty member who more often is a generalist than a specialist in rhetoric. Some are bootstrappers, self-trained. Others' qualifications to teach the course range from specialties in linguistics to medieval studies to world literature. The course as offered in English departments is young (seven programs have offered the course only within the last four years) and understaffed. For the most part, where the course is offered it is offered with some regularity. That in the majority of programs it is offered every other year, however, suggests the course may not be considered the theoretical underpinning of the usually required course in composition theory, which, almost without exception, is offered at least yearly if not every semester.

Course enrollment averages about fourteen graduate students, 72 percent in rhet/comp, 16 percent in literature, 8 percent in critical theory, 3 percent in English Education. This breakdown is about what we'd expect, although it seems significant that more students specializing in critical theory are taking the course than future teachers of writing in our public schools. A question for further study is if the course as currently offered is keeping pace with the burgeoning of interest in rhetorical studies. We need only to look at our journals over the last few years to see the increase in historical studies.

The next series of survey questions dealt with coverage, approach, and required texts and sample assignments. While some

focus on various topics, most courses cover particular periods. Eighty-three percent are one-semester courses, 17 of these courses covering ancient to modern, eight covering Greek and Roman (some of these eight include Augustine), three covering ancient to nineteenth century. Nine programs have a two-, three-, or four-course sequence, some by topic (invention, style, audience) instead of period. That the majority of these programs offer one "catch all" course in rhetoric means we can graduate "specialists" in rhetoric with one course covering more than two thousand years. By analogy, can one imagine a specialist in Renaissance literature who has had but one seminar in the period, a period covering only some 118 years?

In all programs the approach primarily is historical; however, 17 (68 percent) balance history and theory. Other approaches mix history with philosophy or literary criticism or poetics or classical roots of medieval or Renaissance literature. These results suggest that classical rhetoric may reside in English departments but feature the infrastructure and approach of the traditional one in Speech departments.

By far, the majority of these courses emphasize primary texts of Aristotle and Plato, with Cicero coming in a pretty distant third. Few respondents included much study, if any, on the presocratics, Isocrates, and Quintilian. The most used secondary text is George Kennedy's Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times; a far second is James Murphy's A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric. The Kennedy book, covering ancient to modern rhetoric,

perhaps is most often used because most of our programs cover all of rhetoric in one course. Other texts range from Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student to Burke's A Grammar of Motives to Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance to Derrida's Of Grammatology. But the main reading focus on primary texts of Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero suggests this narrowing can, and perhaps does, lead to a misinterpretation and reductionism of classical rhetoric. And a reductionistic approach may be perpetrated when our "specialists" go on to teach classical rhetoric themselves in our existing and future programs.

While a few teachers reported they require weekly reaction papers and reading journals, the majority of the required assignments are the traditional seminar oral and written research papers. Some of the required assignments are writing a platonic dialogue, responding to some contemporary position, critiquing Aristotle's concept of topoi, analyzing a speech according to Aristotelian principles, tracing one concept from classical to modern times, adapting post-structuralist theory to rhetoric. Half of the courses do not require bibliographic reports, but most teachers said that they provide a bibliography (or recommend Horner's The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric) and that they make available particular texts and selections of photocopied materials on reserve.

My survey raises issues for further investigation; I can offer here only some tentative conclusions.

The first conclusion is the fact that the majority of these

courses are sweeping one-semester surveys may make meaningful connections to the teaching of writing difficult. Because many of the courses seem essentially the same as those traditionally taught in Speech Communication, they may not be relevant to composition studies in the ways they need to be. Such courses need to be set in context for writing teachers. The survey results suggest that the classical rhetoric course needs to make stronger connections to the teaching of writing and that too much abstraction has invaded the teaching of classical rhetoric in our doctoral programs. These two questions--how often is the classical rhetoric course taught in relationship to composition and how much abstraction invades the teaching of classical rhetoric in our rhet/comp doctoral programs need further study.

The second tentative conclusion is that appropriation of classical rhetoric in composition studies may be leading to a theoretical disharmony between rhetoricians and compositionists. When we reduce classical rhetoric to the study of only two or three ancient rhetoricians, we may be paving the way for yet more professional books and textbooks that treat or literally call the classical rhetoric they have reduced "that old time religion," thus detaching it from its subdiscipline, composition. A question that needs further exploration is if there is a deepening division between those trained in composition studies who teach the course and classical rhetoricians who teach the course. Perhaps compositionists are selectively raiding classical rhetoric to enrich what they consider theoretically impoverished composition studies in some of our doctoral

programs. Perhaps the classicists who teach the course are not as concerned about the instrumental value of this kind of study as the historical value. Will these attitudes--conscious or not--affect the value of the speciality in rhetoric and composition?

In a yet unpublished article, Marion Sousa of the University of South Carolina argues that the classical rhetoric course is not relevant to composition studies because of this concentration on a very few primary texts. She suggests reducing the emphasis on Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero and adding the sophists at one end and Christian rhetoricians through the fourth century at the other end. And because of the number of texts such a course would require and because so many of the texts are difficult to find and many prohibitively expensive, she suggests putting together an individualized reader for the course so that strong and meaningful connections to the teaching of writing today can be realized. I understand that the program at the University of South Carolina has put together such a reader and that it will be published sometime this year by the University of North Carolina Press. (Bedford Books also will be publishing readings in classical rhetoric, but not for at least two more years.)

To Sousa's suggestions I'd further recommend that we add more study of Isocrates and Quintilian. On reviving Isocrates, the Father of Humanistic Studies, one respondent said, "We're just fooling ourselves about understanding classical rhetoric if we forget the man whose educational system Cicero raved about, and which dictated the classical emphasis on rhetoric for 1000 years." And I believe we need to offer at least a two-semester

course in our programs--even though I realize the question in response: Who would teach it if we hardly have enough specialists to teach the one course, however reduced, in classical rhetoric? But if these suggestions were to be implemented, we could better ensure that our students will obtain a comprehensive understanding of classical rhetoric. Such an understanding can enable them to effectively enter into various discourse theories that existed in classical times and see such theories contextually in their co-studies in composition theory. They then can enter into the current orality-literacy wars battling from one side or the other of the Great Cognitive Divide, debating from an historical perspective. They also can develop the understanding that literacy has meant different things at different times during our history. They can also go on to teach substantive courses in our rhet/comp programs, programs that are, as we know, rapidly growing.

The Chapman/Tate survey showed that our doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition lack uniformity, that "instead of a well-defined core of related courses, many programs require only a certain number of hours in the area" (129). My survey shows that the classical rhetoric course, when offered in these programs, also lacks uniformity. The classical rhetoric course as taught in English departments is not as well-defined as it should be; it takes on too many forms and is too often reductionist. If what we characteristically offer our students is one course spanning more than two thousand years, the unified framework--historical, theoretical, pedagogical--that these

students need cannot be realized. One of the results of not having a well-defined course even where it exists is that we may still be bootstrapping ourselves into scholars and teachers of classical rhetoric. But at least we know that some 77 percent of rhet/comp specialists who will themselves become teachers of writing will in various ways have deepened and strengthened their preparation as scholar/researchers and teachers in rhetoric as well as composition studies. I believe the course in classical rhetoric, because it lies at the very heart of our doctoral programs, can foretell the future of the direction that composition studies will take. What do we want that direction to be?